

**Department of the Interior**  
**STANDARDS FOR THE RETENTION OF ELECTRONIC MAIL (E-MAIL) "SYSTEM" MESSAGES AND**  
**E-MAIL SYSTEM BACKUP TAPES**

**GENERAL REQUIREMENTS:** The following Departmentwide standards are provided with the understanding that each employee is directly responsible for meeting the obligations under the Federal Records Act for the appropriate protection and preservation of his or her Federal records. With respect to e-mail messages, this currently requires each employee to print out and properly file any message on his or her system (including transmission and receipt information) which meets the definition of a "record."

Also, any e-mail message, including any message on a backup tape, that is involved in an active Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, appeal, or litigation **cannot be deleted** until either (a) the message (including transmission and receipt of information) has been appropriately preserved in hard-copy form, or (b) the request, appeal, or litigation has been completed, even if destruction of the message would otherwise be authorized by an approved records retention schedule. This will require close coordination between employees, FOIA Officers, local area network (LAN) system administrators, and the Solicitor's Office.

**E-MAIL RETENTION STANDARDS:** This standard applies to centrally managed e-mail systems that support a shared message store (such as most LAN-based systems like Lotus cc:Mail, Lotus Domino, or Novell GroupWise). A shared message store may also be implemented in IMAP4 based systems. In order to ensure consistency Departmentwide and inform users about standard e-mail retention practices for all e-mail systems, the following criteria must be implemented for the automatic (i.e., system administrator controlled) deletions of e-mail.

**In-Box:** Messages in the IN-BOX will not be automatically deleted unless they are at least 30 days old.

**Out-Box:** If your e-mail system supports an OUT-BOX, messages in the OUT-BOX will not be automatically deleted unless they are at least 30 days old. (NOTE: The OUT-BOX in cc:Mail is called the Message Log.)

**Shared Message Areas:** If your e-mail system supports Bulletin Boards or discussion areas, messages in these areas will not be automatically deleted unless they are at least 30 days old.

**Personal Folders:** There will be no Departmentwide standard established for the retention of records in an individual's personal folder.

**Trash:** There will be no Departmentwide standard established for the retention of records in an individual's trash folder.

**DEPARTMENTWIDE STANDARDS FOR RETENTION OF E-MAIL SYSTEM BACKUP TAPES**

**Use of E-mail System Backup Tapes:** Because e-mail system backup tapes lack many of the features required for record storage, they should not be relied upon by employees as a substitute for proper record retention practices, described above. Rather, backup tapes are intended to permit the reconstruction of a message database in the event of a system failure. For this purpose, there must be sufficient tape retention to provide snapshots (a single backup) of each e-mail post office database. The snapshots must include each day of the last week, and one snapshot of each week of the last month. It is up to the local system

administrator to purchase and maintain their backup system. An example tape rotation that will satisfy the requirement is the following normal rotation of daily and weekly backup tapes.

- Daily System Backup Tapes will be maintained for 1 week and reused. Monday's tape will be used the next Monday, Tuesday's, the next Tuesday, and so on. Daily backups will be an incremental backup unless an incremental backup does not complete a full backup of your e-mail system. In this case, you will need to do a full backup each day.
- Weekly System Backup Tapes will be maintained for 1 month and reused. One day of the week will be designated the weekly backup. This weekly backup will ALWAYS be a FULL system backup. Week 1 will be retained until week 1 of the next month. Week two will be retained until week two of the next month, and so on.

Whether LANs and available e-mail system backup tapes must be searched for records covered by a FOIA request is governed by 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(3)(C), which provides as follows: "In responding. . . to a request for records, an agency shall make reasonable efforts to search for the records in electronic form or format, except when such efforts would significantly interfere with the operation of the agency's automated information system." If employees are careful to preserve e-mail records in hard-copy format, they will minimize the potential burden on the agency to conduct lengthy electronic searches under FOIA.